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ENG 4300-4390-002-098: Senior Seminar in Psychoanalysis and Interpretation

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4300-002/
4390-098

ENG 4300: SENIOR SEMINAR IN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

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Spring, 2006
Phone: 581.6302

Office hours: Tu, Th, 9-11 (and by appoint.)

Required Texts:

Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy*
Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
Nella Larsen, *Passing*
D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers*
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*
Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*
Slavoj Zizek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*

Additional texts will be placed on e-reserve at Booth Library (password is ch4300).

COURSE TRAJECTORIES:

Sigmund Freud inaugurated the field of psychoanalysis with the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900, just seven years before the first meeting of the Modern Language Association, the central institution of our profession. Thus, psychoanalysis and professional literary studies were born out of the same moment and are products of the same era. It should thus come as no surprise that each has always been the occasion for the other: Freud famously worked through many of his formulations of the unconscious as they seemed to him to play out in literature (e.g., the Oedipus complex), and literary scholars have long generated their own sort of pleasure in devising psychoanalysis ways into texts. Psychoanalysis and literary interpretation, we could say, are born partners.

But over the course of the last century, the larger culture's interest in psychoanalysis has waned. Today, with behavioralist clinical models having supplanted psychoanalytic models, there are fewer than 1,000 patients seeking psychoanalytic care in the United States. Indeed, in a culture that has turned more and more to psychotropic drugs as the way for large numbers to experience what is imagined as "normalcy," Freud's "talking cure" seems quaint at best. In the academy, while many literary scholars today continue to work with psychoanalysis as a lens for interpretation, Freud and his school has come under severe critique from feminists, post-colonialists, and historicists.

In this seminar we will study psychoanalysis as an interpretive paradigm, though in the process we will also study it as a theory of consciousness. We will read psychoanalytic thinkers like Freud, but we will also read critiques of psychoanalysis from feminists, post-structuralists, and historicists. Most importantly, though, we will put psychoanalysis to work as a way to unpack meaning from literary texts.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & POLICIES:

Two essays, the first five-six pages or 1250-1500 words in length, the second ten-twelve pages (or 2500-3000 words) in length. Due dates for these papers will appear on the course schedule, forthcoming. The first paper requires you to formulate an argument about one of the literary texts we will have read by midterm, drawing upon the psychoanalytic concepts we have been studying. The main requirement of this first essay is that you develop clear connections between a particular psychoanalytic concept and your primary text, showing how the former can be deployed to unpack meaning from the latter. The second paper will be due on the last day of class and will give you a chance to either develop a longer psychoanalytic interpretation of a literary text or to use psychoanalytic theory as a way of weighing in upon some larger problem of literary interpretation (e.g., literary theory, feminist criticism, historical interpretation, etc.) as such. As to be expected, the bibliography for this paper will be somewhat longer, and the placement of your problem within a wider scholarly context (i.e., what other professional scholars have written about your problem) will be somewhat more developed.

The final paper also requires you to present some portion of your research at this semester's English Studies conference, which is taking place in Coleman Hall on Saturday, April 15. You can go at the conference presentation in two ways: (1) you can simply submit an abstract to the conference organizer, Dr. Robin Murray, by March 31. Or, (2) you can organize panels on psychoanalysis, interpretation, and/or some more specific topic and present together. In this case, you should talk to one another early on about what sorts of panels you might assemble and then formulate a proposal for Dr. Murray including the panel title, panelists' names, and individual paper titles. One again, she will need this information by March 31.

Two examinations. Each of these exams will consist of an objective section designed to assess the closeness of your reading, along with an essay section requiring you to write extended, well-crafted answers to pointed questions about the readings.

One in-class presentation. These presentations will be informal, about ten-fifteen minutes long, and will provide you an opportunity to use the psychoanalytic theory we study to interpret some artifact from contemporary culture: perhaps a TV show, commercial, magazine ad, poem, photograph, art exhibit, political event ... the possibilities are endless. Handouts are always helpful. The emphasis here should be on the free play of the mind: I want you to have fun. But I also want you to challenge yourself to understand what is really at stake in the psychoanalytic concept you're putting to use—view this as a chance to teach the class what you're learning about psychoanalysis by putting some contemporary cultural formation "on the couch."

Participation in discussion: Ours is a senior seminar, and so I assume that everyone will appear weekly as good class citizens, prepared and eager to participate in a demanding discussion. As you surely know by now, participating well doesn't simply mean talking a lot—it means fostering a

dialogue, frequently making comments showing that you are engaged in a process of careful reading and reconsideration of that already read, and showing that you are attuned to what others in the class say. Idle talk—the kind that simply does not indicate creative, close engagement with the materials we'll be studying—does not help move the conversation forward, and hence does not qualify as participation.

Final Grades will be determined by this formula:

Participation.....	10%
Presentation.....	10%
1st Paper.....	15%
2nd Paper.....	25%
1st Exam.....	20%
Final Exam.....	<u>20%</u>
	100%

Attendance: Don't miss class.

Late papers: Generally, I don't give extensions. That said, there are of course sometimes truly unavoidable, unsurmountable circumstances that absolutely prevent a student from completing a paper on time. In such cases, students will provide a full account in writing, and I may then decide to give an extension. But note that in such instances, I will expect to see the extra time reflected in the final draft—papers that have been given an extension are read with an even more demanding eye than those that have not. Lastly: in order to be granted an extension, students must contact me at least two days before the paper's due date.